VI. Adoptive Families: Training, Recruitment, and Support

A. Programs

- Adoption and Permanency Information Fair
- Celebration for Adoptive Families
- Ceremony to Call Out the Names of Children Who Wait
- Faith-Based Outreach
- Meetings and Support Groups for Recent Adoptive Parents
- Training for Adoptive Parents and Children
- Collaborative Permanency Training and Materials

Adoption and Permanency Information Fair

What is it?

The Adoption and Permanency Information Fair brings together local nonprofit agencies that work with and provide services to foster, kinship, and adoptive parents. These agencies set up tables with information about their program, and representatives from the programs are on hand to answer questions.

Why do this?

The information fair is a low-cost, festive event that provides an opportunity for interested families to find out more about the services and resources available to adoptive families in the foster care system.

What goal does this program address?

The goal of the information fair is to address the continuing need to add to the foster parent base in the county by increasing the community's awareness of the services provided to foster, kinship, and adoptive families. In Ventura County, the court develops materials and provides public service announcements in English and Spanish in order to reach the Latino community, where there is a shortage of foster care families.

How can you start this program in your county?

In order to provide the best and most comprehensive information to families, be sure to invite all the appropriate agencies and organizations in your county. Try to have a booth with information from the courts, as well. To make the event more festive, have beverages and some activities for any children who attend. The ultimate success of this event depends on the participation of the community. Ventura County developed flyers to advertise the event. You can also advertise the event through your local newspaper's community calendar and the local television stations' community bulletin boards.

Contact:

Ventura County: Patti Morua-Widdows, Court Manager, Superior Court of California, County of Ventura, 805-981-5938

Celebration for Adoptive Families

What is it?

The Celebration for Adoptive Families is a gathering to celebrate the family's commitment to one another. This event is a good alternative to Adoption Saturdays for courts that do not have a backlog of adoptions but who want to celebrate adoption during Court Adoption and Permanency Month.

Why do this?

A celebration brings together families who have shared in the adoption process. Adopted children, who may feel alone, have an opportunity to form friendships with other adopted children. Additionally, such a celebration helps to bring positive attention to the adoption process and to encourage those who are thinking about adopting to start the process.

What goal does this program address?

A celebration provides an opportunity for the courts, the public and the media to focus on the success of the present adoption system. At the same time, it helps families and children find the post-adoption services and resources they need.

How can you start this program in your county?

In 2005, Kern County organized a celebration for families and children outside the courthouse in Bakersfield with clowns, food, crafts, and gifts. A press conference was held inside the courthouse prior to finalizing adoptions. Displays in the courthouse also provided information about how to adopt and the great need for adoptive families. Several other dinners and celebrations were planned throughout the county. In Monterey County, an adoption celebration has been held in the past on Adoption Saturday. Other counties also invite children who were adopted in previous years. Events may be held in other locations such as local parks, and include breakfasts, luncheons, and gifts for the families and children.

Contacts:

Kern County: Jana Slagle, Kern County Department of Human Services, 661-631-6892

San Bernardino County: Kim Greve, Court District Manager, Superior Court of California, County of San Bernardino, 909-387-7005

Ceremony to Call Out the Names of Children Who Wait

What is it?

A ceremony can be held to remember the children who are still waiting for adoptive parents. Participants include volunteers, court officials, social service employees, community members, and adoptive families.

Why do this?

The ceremony helps to educate the community about the adoption process and to raise awareness about the need for foster parents and adoptive parents. Since California has so many waiting children, the ceremony additionally helps people understand how large and complex this issue is and how much work is needed to solve the problem.

What goal does this program address?

The goals of the program are to involve in the process people unfamiliar with adoption and to publicly recognize the children who are waiting for safe and permanent homes.

How can you start this program in your county?

Invite church leaders, media personalities, school officials, judges, social workers, political leaders, and other community members to take part in the ceremony. Have volunteers take turns reading out the names. The Black Adoption Placement and Research Center has previously organized one such event. The center invited local choirs to perform after the names were read, and concluded the evening with a candlelight vigil and litany. This event would be a good media opportunity.

Several different groups in the Sacramento area hold this type of event at the State Capitol of California. For example, Sierra Adoption Services, Aspira Foster and Family Services and the County of Sacramento-Adoption Bureau hosts prominent members of the community, adoptive parents, and former foster children to participate in a Calling Out.

Contacts:

Black Adoption Placement and Research Center, Sylvia Joyner, 510-430-3600

Sara Hanson, Sierra Adoption Services: 916-368-5114, ext. 237

Faith-Based Outreach

Working With Local Faith-Based Organizations

What is it?

Faith-based outreach is an avenue for a countywide faith-based campaign to promote the need for adoptive families. Churches, mosques, synagogues, and other congregations throughout the county receive informational packets supplied by the county adoptions agency defining the needs for permanency for foster children. The packets should include opportunities for congregations to come forward and allow the county adoptions agency or a committee of local volunteers to recruit within their congregations. The committee may comprise court staff, county adoption services staff, CASAs, and others. Congregations are invited to commit to the cause of helping those children who are waiting for a family to adopt them.

Why do this?

Faith-based outreach is often used to target recruiting families for children who may be difficult to adopt, such as multiple children in a sibling group, older children, and those with special needs. Faith-based outreach is typically targeted specifically during November, but it may take place throughout the year.

What goal does this program address?

Faith-based outreach provides an opportunity for social services, courts, other local organizations invested in foster children’s need for permanency, and the many community members in local congregations to come together and help these children. Additionally, because such outreach helps to draw positive attention to the adoption process before so many people, it encourages those who may have been thinking about adopting to start the process.

How can you start this program in your county?

Make initial contacts with local leaders of congregations, through either phone calls or letters. If the leader of a particular faith community proves too difficult to reach, try contact through associate leaders, societies, or fellowships. If your county already has a committee involving all the local faith communities, this can be a good starting point.

Since 2000, San Diego County has published a calendar pairing local foster children available for adoption with local leaders of the faith community. Local professional photographers volunteer their services and take excellent portraits. They hold an unveiling ceremony for the calendar. The calendar is historically used to promote difficult-to-place children. Subsequent calendars have also related the success stories of children happily adopted who were featured in previous calendars. San Diego also does many other forms of outreach with its faith community.

In June 2006, the Orange County Social Services Agency sponsored their first lunchtime forum for area faith communities. The meeting served several goals, including the stabilizing influence of keeping more foster children in local placements, lowering the number of placements through those more stable placements, and increasing awareness through the larger faith communities. An article from the Orange County Register about this outreach effort is included in the resources division of this section.

Contacts:

San Diego County Adoptions: 877-423-6788

Orange County Social Services: Juan Herrera, Foster and Adoptive Family Recruiter, 714-9403972

Orange County Social Services Agency main number: 1-888-871-5437

Meetings and Support Groups for Recent Adoptive Parents

What is it?

Meetings and support groups can provide information, support, and assistance to recent adoptive parents.

Why do this?

Although the adoption has been completed, the newly created family will likely need help in creating the bonds and ties that characterize many biological families. Adoptive parents may also create a support network among themselves for exchanging good advice and sharing their experiences.

What goal does this program address?

Meetings and support groups for new adoptive parents not only disseminate information but also show such parents that resources are available for them in times of trouble. This program furthers the goal of establishing families with lifelong bonds and ties as strong as those of any biological family.

How can you start this program in your county?

Meetings and workshops are usually sponsored by an agency or an organization working in adoptive services. Pick a topic of concern for newly adoptive parents and present a forum, providing guidance and help for those parents. The Kinship Center offers such programs. Other agencies are altering the support group to fit the needs of the client. Telephone “warm lines”—through which one adoptive parent experiencing difficulty can call and talk to another adoptive parent—provide a type of support group that may be more accessible to a busy parent.

The article in the following resource pages, *The Value of Adoptive Parent Groups,* provides more information on the history, value, formation, and activities of adoptive parent groups. It also contains suggestions for where to find a current group. There is also a listing of current postadoptive family events for California from the Adoptive Families Web site; see the site for the most current listing.

Contacts:

The Kinship Center: 1-800-454-6744
(Locations are available in both Northern and Southern California)
Web site: www.kinshipcenter.org/adoption_california.html

Adoptive Families listing of postadoptive family events:
Web site: www.adoptivefamilies.com/calendar.php?cal=post#CA

Training for Adoptive Parents and Children

What is it?

Training for adoptive parents can entail everything from basic parent training to training on adoptive children's special needs and more specific training focused on the exact needs of a particular child being adopted. The trainers are clinicians, such as social workers and psychologists, who themselves have been trained to help adoptive parents.

Why do this?

Training for adoptive parents and clinicians is necessary to promote permanent and enduring adoptions. Too often, adoptive parents do not know how to read the verbal and nonverbal signs of adoptive children. Clinicians must be trained to help parents interpret these signs and to know what to do.

What goal does this program address?

Training of adoptive parents and clinicians will increase the permanency rate of adoptive placement. Preparing the parent with the skills to communicate to and understand the child will help the parent build the bonds necessary to a trusting relationship.

How can you start this program in your county?

There are groups that offer many different kinds of workshops to train adoptive parents and clinicians. Most of them offer a form of postadoptive services. The Kinship Center, one such agency, provides a variety of workshops for adoptive parents in an adoption clinical training called A.F.T.E.R. They also have a support program called STAR that offers support and training to adoptive parents of children with developmental disabilities and medical, neurological and physical challenges. Both of these programs offer training and other services.

Contacts:

Santa Clara County: A.F.T.E.R. in San Jose, 408-573-8222

Monterey County: A.F.T.E.R. Training-Monterey Bay, 831-455-9965

Web site: www.afteradoption.org/

Collaborative Permanency Training and Materials

What is it?

Collaborative permanency training works with non-attorney child welfare team members to understand and implement permanency laws and regulations. It allows foster and kinship caregivers, agency staff, CASA volunteers, and service providers to understand and implement laws and regulations that affect permanency for foster children and youth. Training curricula is accompanied by legal toolkits that explain child welfare law and regulations in plain language for non-attorneys. All materials contain cites to appropriate statutes and implementation tools such as court forms, checklists, etc.

Why do this?

Non-attorneys in the child welfare system play a vital role in ensuring that legal requirements are met for foster children and youth. Practical legal training for foster and kinship families, CASA volunteers, agency staff, and service providers in the juvenile court process and how to effectively participate in it improves the quality of information provided to the court, resulting in improved judicial decision making.

What goal does the program address?

Collaborative permanency training provides an opportunity for non-attorneys to gain an understanding of how legal requirements shape child welfare practice. Information on topics that affect permanency, such as new permanency legislation, the effect of sibling relationships on permanency options, the role of the child’s attorney, foster and kinship caregiver court participation, and many others are presented in the context of legal mandates. The capacity of non-attorney child welfare professionals and volunteers is enhanced by training on legal issues.

How can you start this program in your county?

Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting (LAPP) provides collaborative permanency training throughout California. Public and private child welfare agencies, community college foster and kinship care education programs, CASA organizations, or foster caregiver groups typically contact LAPP with specific training requests. Trainings can be individualized to meet the informational needs of the target population. LAPP trainers are experienced juvenile dependency attorneys who have cared for foster children in their own homes as foster, kinship, and adoptive parents.

Specific LAPP toolkits are provided to trainees during training sessions or may be purchased separately in bulk on a range of legal topics, including LAPP's 2006 Legislative Update, Personal Rights of Foster Children and Youth, Permanency for California Children in Foster Care, Prudent Parent Decision Making for California Foster and Kinship Parents and many others.

Contact Information:

LAPP
Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting

Regina Deihl
Executive Director
Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting (LAPP)
3182 Campus Drive, Suite 175
San Mateo, CA 94403
Phone: (650)712-1442
Fax: (650) 712-1637
www.LAPPonline.org

B. Resources

- Faith-Based Outreach:
  - National Adoption Day: Faith Community Talking Points 2005
  - National Adoption Day: Faith Leader Announcement 2005
  - National Adoption Day: Template Letter to Faith Organizations 2005
  - Church Groups Asked to Help Foster Kids (Orange County)
- Adoption Assistance Program Brochure
- Listening to Parents: Overcoming Barriers to Adoption of Children From Foster Care
- Foster Care Adoption in the United States: An Analysis of Interest in Adoption and a Review of State Recruitment Strategies: Executive Summary
- National Adoption Information Clearinghouse: The Value of Adoptive Parent Groups
- Child Welfare Permanency Reforms: Post-Adoption Needs and Services
- Navigating the Foster Care System: A Roadmap, Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting (LAPP) Brochure
- Family Builders

Faith Community Talking Points
*Talking points for event planners to use when encouraging faith communities to participate in NAD 2005

- On Saturday, November 19th, a very special celebration is happening in our community. The [INSERT COURTHOUSE] is celebrating National Adoption Day.

- Each year, the National Adoption Day Coalition sponsors National Adoption Day to raise awareness of the need to find permanent, loving homes for the thousands of children in foster care currently available for adoption.

- At the heart of the Day are thousands of children, parents, judges, adoption professionals, volunteer lawyers and child advocates in hundreds of communities across the country who come together to finalize the adoptions of children from foster care and celebrate all families who adopt.

- This year, our community will celebrate the adoption of [INSERT NUMBER OF CHILDREN BEING ADOPTION] children into new, forever families.

- The celebration will include [LIST ADOPTION DAY ACTIVITIES, I.E. ADOPTION PROCEEDINGS, CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION, SPEECHES, GAMES, ENTERTAINMENT].

- In addition to National Adoption Day, there are many ways to show your support for adoption from foster care. Become a foster parent, mentor children in foster care, volunteer. Everything we do will help reach the goal of finding forever families for all children in foster care.

- You'll find more information on National Adoption Day and supporting foster care adoption in general at [INSERT LOCATION OF INFORMATION OR CONTACT INFORMATION].

Statistics

- There are approximately 523,000 foster care children in the United States, and 118,000 of them are available for adoption.

- Since 1987, the number of children in foster care has nearly doubled, and the average time a child remains in foster care has lengthened to nearly three years.

- Each year, approximately 20,000 children in foster care will age out of the system without ever being placed with a permanent family.

Faith Leader Announcement
***Sample text for faith leader/participant to use for an announcement before or after the mass, service, etc.**

On Saturday, November 19th, a very special celebration is happening in our community. The [INSERT COURTHOUSE] is celebrating National Adoption Day. Each year, the National Adoption Day Coalition sponsors the Day to raise awareness of the need to find permanent, loving homes for the thousands of children in foster care currently available for adoption.

This year, [INSERT COMMUNITY NAME] joins hundreds of communities across the country to finalize the adoptions of children from foster care and celebrate all families who adopt.

Our celebration will include [LIST ADOPTION DAY ACTIVITIES, I.E. ADOPTION PROCEEDINGS, CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION, SPEECHES, GAMES, ENTERTAINMENT], and we invite you to become involved with this special day.

At the heart of National Adoption Day are the community members who help make the day memorable for new forever families. Lawyers, child advocates, judges, and adoption professionals volunteer their time to finalize adoptions, and community volunteers help make the day run smoothly for everyone.

In addition to National Adoption Day, there are many ways to show your support for adoption from foster care. Become a foster parent, mentor children in foster care, volunteer. Everything we do will help reach the goal of finding forever families for all children in foster care.

You'll find more information on National Adoption Day and supporting foster care adoption in general at [INSERT LOCATION OF INFORMATION OR CONTACT INFORMATION].

Template Letter to Faith Organizations

[DATE]

[NAME]
[TITLE]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY, STATE, ZIP]

Dear [NAME]:

On a special Saturday just before every Thanksgiving, the National Adoption Day Coalition sponsors National Adoption Day to raise awareness of the need to find permanent, loving homes for the thousands of children in foster care currently available for adoption. This year, on November 19th, we invite you to participate in the [INSERT COMMUNITY NAME] adoption celebration.

At the heart of National Adoption Day are thousands of children, parents, judges, adoption professionals, volunteer lawyers and child advocates and community members who come together to finalize the adoptions of children from foster care and celebrate all families who adopt. In [NAME OF COURTHOUSE], we expect to finalize [NUMBER] of adoptions on this special day.

There are many ways [INSERT NAME OF FAITH ORGANIZATION] can get involved. For example:

- You can download bulletin inserts, posters and fliers from our Web site NationalAdoptionDay.org. for distribution to your faith community;
- We can work with you to add the National Adoption Day Web link to your organization's Web site;
- We can help you get involved in our National Adoption Day celebration by working directly with our planning staff and volunteers;
- You can incorporate National Adoption Day into your faith service announcements or sermons using suggested talking points from NationalAdoptionDay.org.

In addition to National Adoption Day, there are many opportunities to support adoption from foster care. Become a foster parent, mentor children in foster care, volunteer. Everything you do will help reach the goal of finding forever families for all children in foster care. We hope you will join us to make the day a great success for families and children.

Please feel free to contact me at [INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION] if you have any questions. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[TITLE]
[ORGANIZATION]

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Church groups asked to help foster kids

Orange County's Social Services Agency reaches out to the faith-based community to recruit and support foster and adoptive families.

By THERESA WALKER
The Orange County Register

Orange County's Social Services Agency took a leap of faith Wednesday, reaching out to congregations around the county to help find homes in the community for children in the foster care system.

About 100 members from congregations of varying faiths and sizes attended a lunchtime forum in Tustin to learn about the county's need for foster and adoptive families and to discuss ways to engage their churches, mosques and synagogues in recruitment efforts.

The forum marked the first time the Social Services Agency has reached out directly to the faith community. County officials said the effort has been in the making for more than a year and is based on a similar successful effort in Los Angeles County.

"The whole concept is fairly new," said Roylyn Burton, who does recruiting and media outreach for the agency. "We're government – it used to be taboo to even mention churches."

In recent years, the county has begun putting an emphasis on keeping children who are removed from their homes in their communities, either through placement with relatives or local foster families. Research has shown that children in foster care do better when they continue in a familiar environment.

"What we did historically is remove children from harm," said Michael Riley, the county's director of children and family services. "But removing them from everything, maybe the only thing they know, in many ways, we exacerbate their trauma – not purposely, but that's what happens."

Riley estimated that there are about 2,400 Orange County children in out-of-home care. About 400 of those children have been placed in foster homes and group homes in San Bernardino and Riverside counties because of the shortage of foster homes here, he said.

"I'd like to have those kids back here in Orange County," he told the forum participants.

While the county finalizes about 400 to 450 adoptions annually, about 200 children in the foster care system at any given are eligible for adoption. The photos of some of those children were placed throughout the room.

"We thought that the best place to go to talk about good, loving, stable families and homes is the faith-based community," Riley said. "We're willing to come to your churches, mosques, temples – whatever it may be – to talk some more."

An emancipated foster youth also addressed the gathering, providing tearful insight into the lives of children who bounce around the system.

Lauren Calandri, 19, spent 13 years in foster homes, group homes, and Orangewood Children's Home. She had been molested by her father when she was 5 and was neglected by her mother, who abused drugs and alcohol.

Calandri was molested twice more in foster homes where she was placed, and was separated from an older and younger sister who found permanent homes. She said she moved 11 times in the last 10 years.

She would ask herself, "Why does everybody get a home but me? What's wrong with me?"

When she was 9, she attended a Christian summer camp for abused children and attributes that experience to helping her find God and feel that there was a plan for her life, even though she remained in the system.

Today, Calandri attends Hope University in Fullerton on a full scholarship, works as a police cadet with the Tustin Police Department, and plans on attending the police academy. She went back to live with one of her foster families.

Calandri encouraged the members of the faith community to become more involved with children in the foster care system.

"Thank you for being here, for our kids," she said. "If you don't care about them, then God will be the only one who does."

In a breakout session at the end of the two-hour forum, participants brainstormed with social workers on ways to work together to recruit foster and adoptive families as well as help strengthen families in the community so children won't have to be removed from their homes.

When he left, Pastor Steve Beighler of Lamb of God Lutheran Church in Anaheim said the first step for him and for the church's social ministry director, Andrea Matthews, would be promoting awareness in their congregation of about 75 worshipers.

Matthews, who attended the luncheon with Beighler, is the perfect role model. She's adopted nine children over the past 25 years.

"The churches should be active in this because that's what we're here for," Matthews said.

For more information about Orange County Social Services Agency's faith-based outreach, contact Juan Herrera, foster and adoptive family recruiter, at 714-940-3972, or Joan Kaufman, Orange County outreach manager with Child SHARE, at 714-619-0247. For information on becoming a foster or adoptive parent, call 888-871-5437 or go to www.oc4kids.com.

EVAN B. DONALDSON ADOPTION INSTITUTE

Listening to Parents:

Overcoming Barriers to the Adoption of Children from Foster Care

Executive Summary

March 2005

Funded by: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Prepared by: Jeff Katz, Senior Fellow, Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute
in Collaboration with Harvard University & the Urban Institute

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Executive Summary

Each year, public and private child welfare agencies spend tens of millions of dollars to recruit families to adopt children from foster care. Historically, these recruitment efforts have been based on the goal of obtaining large-scale responses to mass-market efforts such as television programs, newspaper columns featuring waiting children, placemats in restaurants, and two-minute "Wednesday's Child" spots on local news broadcasts.

These campaigns are generally designed to get prospective applicants to make an initial phone call to inquire about adoption. By that measure, these efforts frequently succeed in generating initial interest from prospective adoptive parents: Each year, almost a quarter of a million Americans call social service agencies for information about adopting a child from foster care.

But new research by Adoption Institute Senior Fellow Jeff Katz – in conjunction with colleagues at Harvard University and the Urban Institute – shows that prospective parents who seek information about adopting a child from foster care are often put off by a system they view as too hard to access and more focused on screening out bad candidates than welcoming good ones.

Katz and his colleagues (Julie Wilson, Senior Lecturer at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and Rob Geen, Senior Research Associate at the Urban Institute) have conducted the largest study ever undertaken of attrition among prospective adoptive parents of children from foster care. They found the vast majority of adults (78%) who call for more information about becoming adoptive parents will not fill out an application or attend an orientation meeting**.** Just 6% of those who call for information actually complete the adoption homestudy, which is required for all prospective parents. And many of those who do complete a homestudy end up leaving the child welfare agency without ever adopting. While people may decide not to adopt for many reasons, the bottom line is that only a fraction of those recruited to call a child welfare agency actually do adopt.

> "Here at DSS I am scratching at the doors, 'hey, I'm willing to take siblings, I want siblings!' So here I am and I'm not asking you to break the rules, I'm just asking you to lighten up a little bit and you jump instead of me. A little bit, not a lot."
> - *Massachusetts adoption applicant*

Interviews and focus groups with prospective adoptive parents, as well as with agency staff members, document a range of frustrating issues and barriers that keep prospective parents from completing the process. These include differences between the kind of child prospective parents seek (or think they want) and those available; difficulty in accessing the agency or unpleasant initial contacts with it; and ongoing frustration with the agency or aspects of the process. Since this new study shows word of mouth is one of the two primary ways people learn about adopting from foster care (media is the other), such negative experiences may be greatly amplified as frustrated applicants relate their sentiments to their friends, families and acquaintances.

For each of the 126,000 children in foster care who are waiting to be adopted, an alienating experience for a prospective parent can mean the difference between a life spent in the uncertainty of temporary homes and the loving embrace of a permanent family. The cost to these children, and to society as a whole, is incalculable.

According to this research, the most effective way to create permanent, loving homes for waiting children may not be to recruit more families. Rather, it may be to change the system in a way that welcomes and nurtures adults who are willing, and in some cases avidly trying, to adopt a child from foster care.

Internal problems alienate many prospective parents

Researchers for this project, funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, conducted the most intensive and sophisticated effort to date to understand the experience of people who adopt children from public child welfare agencies. The project included surveys of over 40 states, analysis of data from the 1997, 1998, and 1999 federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), more than 140 case record reviews, and case studies of adoption practices in three locations – Boston, Miami and San Jose – that involved focus groups and individual interviews with parents at various stages in the process of adoption, as well as with state and private adoption workers.

> "I had discouraging conversations where I ended up feeling not invited, to sum it up. 'You're not appropriate, you are too old, you are single, you're this, you're that, you want an infant, forget it.' It wasn't really any engagement about whether or not there was a match. That put be back a few months each time."

This study was conceived by Katz, then a Research Fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and now a Senior Fellow at the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, which has assisted in the preparation and dissemination of the research. Katz' work on the project was informed by 10 years of experience as Executive Director of Adoption Rhode Island, a statewide agency that recruits families to adopt children from foster care. The study focused on "general applicants," defined as people who have expressed an interest in adopting a child from the foster care system whom they do not know. The project has, for the first time, documented the extent of attrition as applicants go from their initial inquiry through the adoption process, why large numbers of prospective parents are (or become) discouraged from adopting, and which aspects of the process alienate them.

Among the study's major findings were:

- **The first informational call is key.** People adopt for many reasons. For some callers, their first inquiry about adoption comes at the end of a painful journey that may include illness, infertility, degrading medical procedures, or unbearable loss. When making their first inquiry, applicants noted they wanted to obtain accurate information and to be treated well. Workers also mentioned the need for sensitivity.

> "We've always wanted children and to be married 12 years and no children.… Mother's Day was so traumatic for me every year.… Then this past Mother's Day was the worst.… I couldn't imagine missing motherhood…

- **Agencies often do not handle that first call well**. Parents reported their initial contacts with agencies were the most difficult aspect of the process for two reasons: First, callers often had difficulty reaching the right person, being sent to voice mail or transferred from one person to another. Second, agency personnel answering the first call are often clerical staff with inadequate knowledge of the process, or the focus of the initial call is to screen out "inappropriate" applicants rather than to welcome prospective adoptive parents. Applicants who made a strong initial connection with a worker were best able to tolerate the inevitable frustrations of the process. This connection was often the "make or break" factor for prospective parents.

- **The emphasis is too often on weeding out applicants rather than recruiting them.** Some agencies have procedures that are far more heavily weighted toward screening out inappropriate applicants rather than recruiting, and supporting, good prospective parents. Two examples: multi-page questionnaires that must be filled out before callers may attend informational meetings; and informational meetings that begin with fingerprinting and focus on technical restrictions about who can adopt, rather than on the rewards and challenges of adopting a child from foster care.

- **Parents are generally satisfied with training and homestudy**. Adopting a child who has been placed in foster care because of abuse or neglect is inherently challenging. The great majority of parents who completed the adoption training process reported being pleased with the preparation they received. Although some said their trainings portrayed the children in an overly negative light, most felt they had a better understanding of, and greater sensitivity toward, the children they would be adopting.

- **The attrition rate rises sharply as prospective families go from initial call to adoption**. The research indicates states annually receive about 240,000 inquiries a year from prospective parents regarding the adoption of a child from foster care. Complications in data collection result in significant numbers of "general applicants" being classified as foster parents who adopt their foster children. However, using the state definition of general applicants, only one in 28 people who call for information about the adoption of a child from foster care eventually adopt such a child. Even under a broader definition of "general applicant," the percentage that complete the process clearly is very small.

Primary Recommendations

Despite the impressive strides made in the wake of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, there are about 80,000 waiting children in foster care who will not be adopted this year. For these boys and girls, the 240,000 Americans who will consider adopting from foster care annually are far too valuable a resource to waste. The following recommendations are intended to increase the retention rate of prospective parents in public child welfare agencies and, thereby, to appreciably increase the number of families who adopt from foster care:

- **Answer the phone, and have qualified staff do it**. This is a critically important initial step to improve waiting children's prospects of getting loving, permanent homes. Agencies therefore should have specialized adoption hotlines, and the phones should be answered by well-trained and friendly individuals who can assure callers of a direct and immediate response.

> "My first experience was my sister calling me about a boy who had been on TV. . . I just wanted to know about this little boy and it just seems like it was a thousand phone calls and a thousand people and this one doesn't know what you are talking about and let me transfer you to somebody else...."

- **Address prospective parents' emotional needs during initial contact**. For most prospective adoptive parents, their first contact with a public child welfare agency is a sensitive, highly charged emotional experience. The first person to speak with them therefore should be a professional staff member with a background in counseling and specialized training in adoption.

- **Emphasize recruitment at the start of the process**. During initial contact, informational meetings and orientation, the risk of alienating potentially suitable parents far outweighs that of allowing inappropriate applicants to begin training. During this stage, prospective parents should get clear, written guidelines about qualifications and grounds for being screened out.

- **Separate screening and training functions to the extent possible.** There is an inherent conflict for parents dealing with adoption workers. They are asked, and generally want, to be open with their feelings as a necessary part of preparation – but the adoption worker also is their judge, and has the power to grant or deny placement of a child. Since applicants stress the importance of having a strong personal connection with a caseworker, agencies should try to separate screening and training, especially at the beginning of the process.

- **Listen to prospective parents.** It is critical that child welfare agencies develop ways of listening to prospective parents throughout the adoption process, then respond to their needs and concerns. Every child welfare system should therefore establish a process for soliciting and incorporating such feedback. This can be accomplished through surveys, focus groups, parent advisory boards, and other means.

Additional recommendations

- **Provide families with a clear, written roadmap of the process**. Parents in this study expressed great confusion about the adoption process – including the roles that various workers play, relationships among different agencies, and the sequential steps they have to take. Providing an explicit explanation could make a major difference in retaining applicants.

- **Provide applicants with a balanced perspective**. While agencies must present a realistic view of the challenges applicants may face, it is vital to remember that adoption is about hope. So agencies should include information about the rewards as well as the challenges, for instance by bringing satisfied adoptive parents into trainings early in the process.

- **Develop a buddy system, outside the agency, to support applicants**. For prospective parents, adoption is an emotionally intense experience. But for an overworked agency, whose focus is the child, the resources may not be available to provide the “hand-holding” applicants require. Established adoptive parents can help provide the necessary support.

Conclusion

In adoption, the paramount goal of public child welfare agencies is to find families for children, and *not* to find children for families. When private agencies charge tens of thousands of dollars to help a family adopt an infant domestically or a child from another country, the prospective adoptive parents can expect (and demand) a level of service for their money that it is difficult for public child welfare agencies to match. Although the public agencies charge no fees, their focus must always be on their primary clients: the abused and neglected children in their care. Even so, these agencies must recognize the need to support adoptive parents and treat them as the precious resource they are: the only positive outcome available for the children who can never return to their original homes. Only by listening to the people who have dealt with the system – adoptive parents and those who never became parents – can we provide the opportunity of a loving family for every child still waiting for a permanent home.

national adoption day

www.nationaladoptionday.org

Executive Summary

On any given day in the United States, more than 100,000 foster children are waiting to be adopted by someone who can provide a permanent, loving home. While they wait, these children often live with foster parents, with relatives, or in group homes or institutions. Extensive recruitment efforts have been undertaken at the state and federal levels to identify homes for these children. Yet many children still wait a very long time for a new family.

The National Adoption Day Coalition works to draw attention to these children and celebrate loving parents that choose to adopt. The Coalition, comprised of eight partners—The Alliance for Children's Rights, Casey Family Services, Children's Action Network, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption®, Freddie Mac Foundation, and Target Corporation—commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a study to look more closely at how states find adoptive families for children in foster care.

Last year, the research report commissioned by the National Adoption Day Coalition identified primary barriers and promising approaches to move foster children into adoptive homes. Leading the list of barriers was the difficulty in finding enough interested and able families to adopt waiting children. This year's report looks more closely at this problem. It provides a first-time national look at the state of adoption recruitment by describing: levels of interest in adoption, who takes steps toward adopting, and how interest might be channeled toward foster care adoption. In doing so, it provides needed direction to states and federal policymakers in crafting future recruitment strategies.

Key Findings

- **Women's Interest in Adopting Increased by 38 Percent between 1995 and 2002**
  Based on estimates from the National Survey of Family Growth, 18 million women reported being interested in adopting in 2002. This represents a 38 percent increase since 1995 when 13 million women reported interest. The 18 million women interested in 2002 represents a third (33 percent) of the population of women ages 18 to 44, up from about a quarter (24 percent) of women (13 million) in 1995.

- **Women's Interest in Adopting Increased across Demographic Groups**
  More women reported an interest in adopting in 2002 than in 1995 in nearly all age, race and ethnic, income, education, and religious groups. Some groups of interest to recruiters seeking homes for foster children saw notable percent increases: black women (35 percent), Hispanic women (29 percent), lower-income women (50 percent) (women with family incomes below 150 percent of the federal poverty level), Protestant women (41 percent), and 18- to 24-year-olds (73 percent).

- **Many Women Interested in Adopting Special Needs Children**
  Of the women currently seeking to adopt in 2002, many reported a willingness to adopt children with characteristics similar to those waiting to be adopted. For example, the vast majority (97 percent) of women currently seeking to adopt would be willing to accept a minority child. Nearly a third of women (31 percent) said they would be willing to adopt a child that is 13 years old or older. Ninety percent of women reported a willingness to adopt a child with a mild disability, and 31 percent said they would accept a child with a severe disability. Seventy-five percent of women said they would be willing to accept a sibling group.

- **Women Interested In Adoption Were Less Likely to Take Steps to Adopt in 2002 than in 1995**
  In 2002, 10 percent (1.9 million) of the women who reported an interest in adopting took steps toward this end. This portion represents a decline since 1995, when 16 percent (2.1 million) of the women who reported interest took steps. Declines in the portion of interested women taking steps occurred for many demographic groups. For some groups of interested women, the percentage that took steps remained fairly steady: 30- to 34-year-olds, black women, Hispanic women, unmarried women, and lower-income women.

- **States Use Multiple Types of Recruitment Strategies**
  All states and the District of Columbia use child-specific recruitment as part of their recruitment strategy, and most states also incorporate general and targeted recruitment as part of their strategies. The majority of states (40) use all three types of recruitment in their strategies to recruit adoptive homes. In fact, only two states reported using just one recruitment type as part of their overall recruiting strategy.

- **States Employ Innovative Recruitment Strategies to Translate Interest Into Action**
States conduct general, child-specific, and targeted recruitment through a variety of activities. A majority of states (42) use the media to feature children. All states offer photo listings depicting their children in foster care. Over half of states (32) use faith-based recruitment. And some states use fost-adopt strategies (10), language-based initiatives (10), or word-of-mouth efforts (11). The examples of each of these strategies provided in the report reflect a greater need not to just make families aware of the need for adoptive families, but to personally engage and retain families in the recruitment process.

Recommendations

The National Adoption Day Coalition is encouraged by the dramatic increase in interest in adoption and the extensive recruitment activity occurring across the nation. However, given that interest often does not translate into action, there still is much work to be done to ensure that all children find the permanent, loving families they need and deserve. Based on this research report, the National Adoption Day Coalition recommends the following:

- **Shift in Messaging from Awareness to Taking Action**
These findings suggest significant progress has been made in generating interest and awareness around adoption. While this is an important first step, the findings also reveal that future campaigns are needed to encourage those interested and able to adopt a foster child to actually take steps toward that end. Future campaigns might shift from telling prospective parents that anyone can adopt to telling interested adopters *how* they can adopt.

- **Channel Interest toward Foster Care Adoption**
The findings in this report also suggest an opportunity to encourage the option of foster adoption in comparison to other types of adoption. Foster care adoption may be less costly than other types of adoption and often offers financial supports and post-adoption services to families that other types of adoption may not provide. Moreover, it is a means by which to help children in one's own community who need homes.

- **Use Targeted Recruitment to Focus on High-Propensity Groups**
The report identifies key groups of women for whom interest is up and levels of taking action have not declined: 30- to 34-year-olds, black and Hispanic women, unmarried women, and lower-income women. States might consider more expansive targeted efforts toward these women.

- **Encourage Individuals Not Taking Steps to Participate in Other Ways**
There are many ways to support the foster care adoption process other than by adopting. With so many individuals interested in adopting but not taking steps, the field might consider strategies to encourage these individuals to support foster care adoption in other ways.

- **Develop a Consumer-Friendly Foster Care Adoption Process**
In order to sell the foster care adoption process as a viable option to potential adopters, the process itself must be efficient and consumer-friendly. For interested families, the first call they make or the first web site they see may leave lasting impressions. Three stages of the process should be considered as part of efforts to make the process more consumer-friendly: the circumstances of the first contact interested adopters have with agencies, the navigation strategies for guiding families through the process, and the supports and services available to the adoptive family and child.

- **Use Available Resources to Develop New Recruitment Strategies**
The Federal Adoption Opportunities Program (AOP) grants might be targeted to enhance recruitment activities. Grants could be used for improving adoption web sites and responses to inquiries, developing adoption support services for families seeking to adopt, or funding positions for parent advocates.

- **Test the Effectiveness of Recruitment Strategies with Rigorous Research**
All states are conducting recruitment activities, yet there is little research indicating what works. Rigorous evaluations and better data are needed to understand the strategies that result in successful adoptions.

The Value of Adoptive Parent Groups

Parenting has often been called the most complex profession. It becomes even more so when the family includes a child who has been adopted. This is true whether the child is an infant, has special needs, or is of a different race or ethnic background. Adoptive parent groups help parents share, understand, and manage these complexities. Whether it's general support, such as enduring the adoption waiting period, or specific advice, such as traveling to an unfamiliar country to receive a child, adoptive parent groups have unparalleled value.

What Adoptive Parent Groups Can Do For You

In the following comments, prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents attest to the wide range of benefits.

Adoptive Parent Groups Provide Educational and Social Activities

"We talked with other families and learned about topics ranging from Korean culture to sexual acting out. These sessions were not only educational, but great social get-togethers as well, with hot chocolate and popcorn. These were opportunities to get to know one another, hear each other's kids' stories, and learn of their progress."

Adoptive Parent Groups Can Lead to the Formation of a Play Group

"As each mother arrived with a child or children, there was a buzz of excitement as the mothers asked names, country of birth, and age. Standing around our darlings as they invaded the toy box, the four of us were mesmerized with the scene of commonality of the children's height, their playfulness, and their Latin American cuteness."

"Once the children were settled into playing, we chatted and chatted about so many topics all dealing with adoption, or Latin culture issues—we shared stories, our older children's conversations, and our own observations. It was like a flood of topics needing to emerge from each of us that we sometimes forgot the toddlers until there was a yell or a tugging at a toy."

Adoptive Parent Groups Can Bring Comfort in the Form of a Newsletter

"Your newsletter has been a real source of support for us. We have lived in Arizona for a year and a half now, and we still very much miss a strong, supportive parent group."

Adoptive Parent Groups Can Provide Examples of the Problems and Pleasures of Parenting a Child With Special Needs

"One thing that makes adopting a child with special needs easier is the encouragement and advice that you get from other group members whose children have experienced the same or almost similar emotional/behavior problems."

Adoptive Parent Groups Can Be Supportive to Prospective Adoptive Parents While They Wait for Their Child

"Our group is unique in many ways, but mainly because we are like a family. Our children range from infants to teenagers, and some families join us to just endure the `wait' until their child arrives."

Adoptive Parent Groups Can Provide Guidance for Prospective Adoptive Parents Planning Intercountry Adoption

"One woman we spoke with provided us with a diary of her trip, giving the sequence of steps. This was invaluable despite the minor changes we encountered. The more we learned from other adoptive parents, the better we felt about our impending trip into the unknown."

Prospective adoptive parents have much to gain from the experience of adoptive parents, who can advise them on how to deal with agencies on issues of licensure, home studies, and fees. Talking with adoptive families can expose them to the potential difficulties of parenting. It can also reveal the successes and joys.

History of Adoptive Parent Groups

The first formal adoptive parent group started in the New York City metropolitan area in 1955. The group was called Adoptive Parents Committee, and it is still active today. Not long after, in 1957, some families involved in intercountry and transracial adoption in Montreal, Canada started a group. The adoptive parents felt they needed a support group to help them deal with special issues that accompanied these kinds of adoptions. This type of networking rapidly became popular throughout Canada and the United States. By the late 1960s, parents in several cities in both countries began to form similar organizations.

Until then, adoption in the United States was almost exclusively restricted to healthy Caucasian infants. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, when adoption expanded to other kinds of children— those who were older, had developmental disabilities, and were from other countries or of mixed race—it became evident that parents needed help beyond that provided by agencies.

Even families who had adopted healthy infants found themselves needing support for several reasons. More adopted children insisted on knowing who their birth parents were; some actively searched for them. Many adoptive parents were stunned, having never imagined they would one day face a possible reunion of their adopted child and his or her birth parents. They needed help to cope—and it was parent groups to which they often turned.

Also, adoptive parents found children needing support on other fronts. In some cases, the expression of the normal adolescent need for autonomy and independence seemed more intense for adopted children. Some parents wanted to know how other families told their children they were adopted. Or they wondered what happened when children were not told early and learned of their adoptive status later in life. Information and experiences exchanged by the parents were invaluable.

The Value of Adoptive Parent Groups

Regardless of the type of adoption, an adoptive parent group has value to the

- adoptive family
- prospective adoptive family
- child
- social worker
- waiting child
- legislative process.

Value to the Adoptive Family

Although many adoption agencies provide services to families after the adoption has been finalized, adoptive parent groups provide a different kind of environment that often feels more comfortable. The family can find a support system and friendship. Parents can relate easily to the advice and experience of those who have been there. They are able to express negative feelings about the child without fear of judgment.

Parents of young children often are interested in educational activities about general parenting skills. Once children reach the age when they become more aware of the adoption issue, the support that groups can offer parents becomes more important.

Value to the Prospective Adoptive Family

An adoptive parent group gives waiting families an in-depth understanding of adoption and enables them to hear first hand about the successes and the problems that may be encountered. They can probably meet others who have adopted children similar to the one they want to adopt. Families who have already adopted can offer advice and guidance that makes the adoption process more understandable and less threatening.

Value to the Child

Children benefit from knowing other children who have been adopted and their parents. They can share their feelings and concerns about being adopted, about their birth parents, and about their cultural heritages if they were adopted from foreign countries.

Value to the Waiting Child

Through adoptive parent groups, more people become aware of children with special needs and feel comfortable entertaining the idea of adopting such children. Through the groups, directly and indirectly, more children are adopted. Groups often include both adoptive parents and people interested but not certain they want to proceed. Being part of an adoptive parent organization often gives the knowledge and the confidence to move ahead into adoption.

Value to the Legislative Process

Parent groups have been the force behind many of the valuable changes in adoption. These changes have benefited children with special needs and allowed parents to have a stronger voice in many vital issues. For example, parent groups were instrumental in getting legislation passed in which the Federal Government agreed to provide funds to expand adoption opportunities for children. This included making subsidized adoption a reality, so that families who were qualified to adopt but could not afford it were able to do so. Parent groups have consistently testified at hearings on a variety of child welfare issues. The North American Council on Adoptable Children, a national adoption support group, developed National Adoption Awareness Month, which has brought awareness about adoption to people throughout the country.

Value to the Social Worker

Many adoption social workers were trained only in the adoption of infants. Much of what they have learned about adoption of children with special needs has come from the experiences of adoptive parents. This knowledge helps them work more effectively with prospective adoptive parents.

Formation of Groups

Adoptive parent groups are formed in different ways and around different issues. They may spin off from an agency dealing with many interested parents at the same time. They may be a collection of parents from diverse sources coming together around a common issue, such as adopting children of mixed race. Subgroups may form within a main group addressing special interest areas or child age groups.

Activities of Groups

Adoptive parent groups usually engage in social, educational, and support activities. The types of activities undertaken in each category are listed below.

Social Activities

- Parties, including those focusing on the culture and traditions of the children adopted from other countries
- Potluck suppers
- Discussion groups for older children
- Holiday celebrations
- Night on the town just for parents.

Educational Activities

- Production of newsletters about adoption issues and newly adopted children of members
- Preparation for parenting through special training
- Referrals to newsletters, books, and other resource materials
- Referrals to appropriate agency and community resources
- Providing up-to-date information on children available for adoption
- Participation in agency staff training and development
- Convening public information meetings to discuss current adoption issues

- Educating legislative groups and Government sources about child welfare issues
- Information on the foreign culture of the children adopted internationally.

Support Activities

- Postplacement support through a "buddy system," "listening ear," telephone counseling, crisis intervention, and assistance
- "While you wait" meetings for adoptive applicants
- Special groups for special circumstances; that is, single parents, parents of teenagers, parents of disabled children, parents who have adopted transracially, or divorced parents.

Where to Find a Group

The resources listed below can help parents seeking local or special interest adoptive parent support groups.

The **North American Council on Adoptable Children** (NACAC), a nonprofit umbrella organization of adoptive parent groups, was formed in 1974 as a coordinator for newly forming parent groups. It facilitates information sharing among groups, holds a national conference and helps new groups start. Contact NACAC at 970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114-1149, (612) 644- 3036.

Adoptive Families of America (AFA) is a national parent group with chapters throughout the country promoting domestic and intercountry adoption. Contact AFA at 2309 Como Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 535-4829 or (800) 372-3300.

Families Adopting Children Everywhere (FACE) is an adoptive parent support organization in the Maryland and Washington, D.C. areas. It gathers information about adoption resources in the whole mid-Atlantic region. Contact FACE at P.O. Box 28058 Northwood Station, Baltimore, MD 21239, (410) 488-2656.

Latin America Parents Association (LAPA) is a support group for parents who have adopted or wish to adopt children from Latin America. Contact LAPA at P.O. Box 339, Brooklyn, NY 11234, (718) 236-8689. Other chapters are located in Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland (Metropolitan Washington, DC), New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The **Committee for Single Adoptive Parents** is an umbrella organization of single adoptive and prospective adoptive parent support groups. Its address is P.O. Box 15084, Chevy Chase, MD 20825.

The National Adoption Center (NAC) focuses on the adoption of children with special needs. Contact NAC at 1500 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102, (215) 735- 9988 or 1-800-TO-ADOPT.

The **National Adoption Information Clearinghouse**, 330 C Street, SW, Washington, D.C. 20447, (703) 352-3488 or 1 (888) 251-0075, has a comprehensive listing of foster/adoptive parent support groups in each State in its National Adoption Directory (http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/general/nad/index.cfm).

Child Welfare Information Gateway
PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

A FACTSHEET FOR FAMILIES

March 2006

Postadoption Services

It is common for adoptive families to need support and services after adoption. Postadoption services can help families with a wide range of issues. They are available for everything from learning how to explain adoption to a preschooler, to helping a child who experienced early childhood abuse, to helping with an adopted teen's search for identity. Experience with adoptive families has shown that all family members can benefit from some type of

What's Inside:

- Postadoption issues that most adoptive families encounter
- Milestones that may trigger a need for postadoption support
- Types of postadoption services
- Finding postadoption services
- Paying for postadoption services
- Resources

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

Child Welfare Information Gateway
Children's Bureau/ACYF
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW
Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20024
703.385.7565 or 800.394.3366
Email: info@childwelfare.gov
www.childwelfare.gov

postadoption support. Families of children who have experienced trauma, neglect, or institutionalization may require more intensive services.

Postadoption Issues That Most Adoptive Families Encounter

Because of the lifelong impact of adoption, members of adoptive families may want or need additional support, education, and other services as their children grow. The following are some issues for which families typically seek postadoption support.

Loss and Grief

All adopted children experience loss at one or more points in their lives, and they may grieve their loss as they come to understand the role that adoption has played in their lives. They may struggle with understanding why they were placed for adoption and how that affects who they are. These feelings may change and reappear at different stages of life. Some adopted children may be confused by conflicting emotions about their birth parents—anger at having been placed for adoption or having their birth parents' rights terminated or worry about their birth parents' circumstances. All of these feelings may be acted out as hostility toward their adoptive parents.

Adoptive parents also may experience loss and grief issues of their own, often stemming from infertility issues or the stresses of the adoption experience itself. For some adoptive parents, these issues may cause strains in their marriages.[1]

Understanding Adoption

Children's understanding of adoption changes as they mature and can begin to comprehend its complex social and emotional foundations. Parents need to know how to answer children's questions at each stage of development.

Trust and Attachment

Children who have experienced abuse, neglect, or institutionalization prior to joining their adoptive families often have not known consistent love and affection and may have difficulty trusting and attaching to their new family. In fact, any child separated from birth parents has experienced a break in attachment. These children may need help to begin to make sense of their history and come to terms with what has happened in their lives.

School Problems

Children adopted from foster care often have experienced multiple placements among homes, as well as multiple moves among schools. An educational consultant or a child psychologist may be able to test for educational status and work with teachers from the child's school to ensure an appropriate education. School problems and the need for the services of an educational consultant may also be helpful for older

[1] The Federal government currently funds demonstration projects in postadoption services and marriage education in seven States (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs_fund/discretionary/2004.htm), as well as the Healthy Marriage Initiative (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage); both of these efforts may help couples with the stresses associated with these losses.

children adopted through intercountry adoptions who already have some school experience in their former country.

Other school issues can arise around classroom assignments that are insensitive or inappropriate for adopted children, such as traditional "family tree" assignments or basic genetics lessons (e.g., identifying inherited family traits). Additionally, school is where many adopted children are first challenged to explain adoption to their peers, often as they themselves are just beginning to understand what it means. Some materials have been developed for adoptive parents and educators to use in the classroom and to educate teachers and other school personnel about adoption. Support groups may be especially helpful in pointing adoptive parents to appropriate materials.

Post Institutionalization Issues and Behaviors

Children who have spent more than a few months in an institutional setting may have missed out on important developmental activities due to a lack of stimulation and suboptimal nutrition. They may have difficulties with feeding, sleeping, and speech, as well as difficulties in forming healthy attachments.

Identity Formation

Teenagers who were adopted at any age may experience identity confusion as they confront the primary questions of adolescence—"Who am I? How am I different from my parents? Which of their values will I take as my own?" Young people who joined their families through adoption also must try to determine how these questions relate to their birth parents, who may be unknown and even unknowable. These questions may be further complicated if the child's race or birth culture differs from that of the adoptive family.

Birth Relative Contact

During the past decade or two, the professional adoption community has learned that many adopted children and adults desire or even need information about their birth family or to reconnect with birth relatives. This desire in no way reflects upon adoptive family relationships or the quality of parenting that adopted children received. Agency staff and private specialists can assist in providing information about birth relatives or in initiating contact, if desired, and mediating the relationships that may form.

Medical Concerns

Children who have been in multiple placements may not have received regular medical care. These children, as well as children adopted through intercountry adoptions, often have medical information that is inaccurate and/or incomplete. It is important for all children to have as complete and accurate a health history as possible. Assessment by an adoption-competent physician will provide a plan to update a child's health and immunization status.

Racial Issues

Adults who parent children of different races or cultures need skills to prepare their children to function successfully in a race-conscious society. A survey of adults who had been adopted from Korea as infants or children found that racial discrimination was one of the most profound issues they faced.[2] Parents who do not have personal experience as a target of racial prejudice must learn how to prepare their children as much as possible. (Information Gateway provides a factsheet on this topic, *Transracial and Transcultural Adoption*, available at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm.)

PARENTING THE ADOPTED CHILD

Child Welfare Information Gateway (Information Gateway) has a wealth of material on parenting the adopted child. To link to these resources, visit the following Information Gateway webpage: www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/postadoption.

Milestones That May Trigger a Need for Postadoption Support

Children understand, think, and feel differently about their adoption at different developmental stages. For most adopted children most of the time, thinking about adoption and its complexities does not occupy a large amount of time and focus. They are busy with schoolwork and sports activities, religious functions, social events, family gatherings, and squabbling with their siblings.

But there are times and events that predictably trigger adoption issues. Parents should watch for signs, such as changes in mood or eating and sleeping habits, indicating that their adopted child may need special support during these times. Children can be prepared by discussing the possibility that these triggers will cause a reaction, which a child likely cannot control. Parents should let their children know that they understand what is happening and will be there to help and find other resources as needed.

Common adoption issue triggers:

- Birthdays (of the adopted child, siblings, parents, birth parents)
- Anniversaries (of placement into foster care, an orphanage, or into the adoptive family, or the date of adoption finalization)
- Holidays (especially Mother's and Father's Days, but any holiday that involves family gatherings and sentiment, such as Christmas, Passover, or Thanksgiving)
- Entering kindergarten and first grade (which may be the first time an adopted child must explain adoption to peers; it can be the first time the child realizes that most children were not adopted into their families)
- Puberty (as children become sexually mature and able to conceive or father a baby themselves, thoughts of birth parents may arise)
- Adoptive mother's pregnancy and birth of child, or adoption of another child (may

[2] Freundlich, M., & Lieberthal, J. A. (2000) *A gathering of the first generation of adult Korean adoptees: Adoptees' perceptions of international adoption*. The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. Retrieved August 2005 from http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/proed/korfindings.html

trigger doubts about the adopted child's place in the family)

- Adopted person's pregnancy and birth of child or fathering of a child (often a powerful trigger that may ignite interest in reconnecting with birth relatives, if only to obtain medical histories and updated information)

Types of Postadoption Services

The extraordinarily wide range of issues that can be addressed with postadoption services means that the services themselves must be diverse. Here are the most common types of postadoption services, including those that families have identified as most helpful.

Adoptive Parent Support Groups

In an adoptive parent support group, adoptive and prospective adoptive parents come together to offer and receive information and support from their peers. Parent groups offer their members and other participants a support system, friendships, educational programming, social interactions with other adoptive families, and advice from experienced adoptive parents. Parent groups exist throughout the country and vary extensively, from small playgroups for toddlers adopted through intercountry adoptions to large regional groups offering a range of programs and services to their members (who can number in the hundreds). Most parent groups are organized and administered by adoptive parent volunteers.

Parent groups may restrict their focus to families with children who share certain characteristics (such as having been adopted from a specific country or having been adopted through a public agency), or they may include all adoptive families in their programming. A number of national parent groups are organized into local chapters. Local adoption agencies and State adoption offices also may have information on newly formed groups. Parent groups can be located through Information Gateway's National Adoption Directory at www.childwelfare.gov/nad.

Programs and services commonly offered by parent groups include:

- Telephone warm lines
- Buddy families
- Respite care
- Lending library
- Workshops/conferences
- Pre-adoption support
- Social activities
- Children's support groups
- Ethnic heritage activities
- Newsletter
- Legislative advocacy
- Information and referral

Online Support Groups

Available 24 hours a day, Internet support groups now number in the thousands. Through participating in these groups, parents will likely find families who have experienced exactly what they are going through and who will be able to provide helpful suggestions. Parents should remember, however, to use the same precautions with online support groups that are used for any Internet activity.

Psychological Therapy/Counseling

Members of adoptive families may at times want or need professional help as concerns or problems arise. Timely intervention by a professional skilled in adoption issues often can prevent concerns from becoming more serious problems. The type and duration of therapy will vary depending on the kinds of problems being addressed. Some families build a relationship with a therapist over years, "checking in" for help as needed. Others find they need a therapist's help only occasionally.

There are many types of therapeutic interventions and many kinds of clinicians offering adoption therapy. For information about adoption therapy, the kinds of issues that it can address, and how to find the right mental health professional, see *Selecting and Working with an Adoption Therapist* (www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_therapist.cfm).

Respite Care

Sometimes parents just need to get away for a while, reframe their problems, and get some rest. Respite care is a service that offers parents a temporary break from their parenting responsibilities. It is meant for families with children who require more skilled care than babysitters can provide or for parents going through a crisis of their own. Respite care can be in-home, meaning the respite worker comes to the house and stays with the children while the parents go out. With out-of-home respite, the parents take the children to a designated site.

Respite care may be available on a regularly scheduled or crisis basis from a State postadoption unit or local adoption agencies, or through a local adoptive parent group.

Seminars/Conferences

Many adoptive parent support groups, adoption agencies, and postadoption service organizations offer education in adoption issues through workshops and conferences that range in length from a few hours to a few days. At an adoption conference, parents can learn about the adoption topics that are most important to them, have questions answered by the experts, socialize with other adoptive family members, and have the opportunity to purchase adoption-related books and other informative materials. Topics covered at these trainings may include how to discuss adoption with children, strategies for building attachment, parenting challenging children, dealing with adoption at school, parenting children who have been adopted transracially, search and reunion issues, supporting cultural heritage in international adoption, and much more. Adoption agencies will often offer seminars on such topics as specific types of child behavior, child development, and talking to children about adoption. (Search the Information Gateway conference calendar at www.childwelfare.gov/calendar/index.cfm.)

Scholarships are sometimes available to help with the cost of attending adoption education conferences and seminars. State postadoption funding may be available for families who adopted through public agencies. Parents can check with conference organizers regarding scholarship opportunities.

Books and Magazines

There are many helpful books on adoption for children and adults. Many of the children's books explain the "whys" of adoption and describe the process by which children are adopted. Some may help as children begin to question and discuss their own adoption story. Some of the books help parents look at the unique aspects of adoptive parenting. Others are written specifically for those who have adopted children with particular needs or who are parenting children from other cultures.

There also are a number of magazines for adoptive families, available by subscription or online. Each provides parenting information and support specifically for families formed through adoption.

Camps/Recreational Opportunities/Heritage Camps

Overnight camps or retreats are a powerful way for members of adoptive families to connect not only with others like themselves, but also with their own family members. Such events, typically weeklong, often combine adoption and ethnic heritage education and support with traditional camping activities. Family camps offer activities for all members of the family.

Other camps serve children of certain ages and/or ethnicities. Often siblings of children who have been adopted internationally are also included in heritage camp and find it enlightening to be among the minority, as their siblings frequently are. Heritage camp counselors are frequently older adopted youth, who provide critical role models for their younger counterparts. Frequently, camp attendees form powerful friendships with other adopted children, and they provide each other ongoing support all year long. In recent years, highly specialized camping experiences have become available for siblings separated by adoption to establish, reestablish, or strengthen their relationships with each other.

Finding Postadoption Services

Details about postadoption services in a particular area are available from local, State, and national information resources. Parents should call the public and private adoption agencies in their area and ask to be placed on their mailing lists for postadoption events. While some of these may be restricted to families who adopted through the agency, many postadoption services offered by agencies will be open to all adoptive families. Adoptive parent support groups also will have information about local agencies and organizations that provide postadoption services and their upcoming events.

The following is a listing of resources for information about local postadoption services.

Public and Private Adoption Agencies. Many adoption agencies have a postadoption specialist on staff, and many larger agencies have complete postadoption services departments. Agencies may offer counseling by on-staff clinicians, or they can refer parents to adoption-competent therapists. Among the postadoption services offered by agencies are support groups for parents and children, educational workshops and events, cultural heritage events, respite care, and support with birth family relationships.

Specialized Postadoption Services Organizations. Agencies offering postadoption services exclusively are becoming more prevalent throughout the country. They typically offer the same kinds of postadoption services as do adoption agencies, but they do not place children for adoption and may not be affiliated with any specific adoption agency.

Adoptive Parent Support Groups. Parent groups offer information about local postadoption service providers and referrals to adoption-competent therapists. Educational events, respite care, and cultural events are among the many kinds of support a parent group may offer.

State and County Adoption Offices and Postadoption Specialists. Most State and county adoption offices have identified staff who are responsible for adoption and postadoption services or adoption subsidies. Larger jurisdictions may offer services themselves, but all will have information about local postadoption services and providers.

Adoptive parents can find out if their child is eligible for these services by contacting the adoption specialist for that jurisdiction. To find contact information for all of the State Adoption Specialists, search the National Adoption Directory at www.childwelfare.gov/nad.

State Postadoption Resource Centers. Some States now provide a resource center specifically for postadoption services. Some of these resource centers serve only those families who have adopted children through domestic foster care, while other centers may have no restrictions on who is eligible to use their services. Most offer programs and all provide information about local postadoption services and providers.

Public and Private Mental Health Service Providers. Mental health service providers will offer counseling on issues affecting adoptive families. Parents should be sure that the provider is adoption competent (has experience and is skilled in working with adoptive families) or willing to learn about the special issues and dynamics of adoptive families. (See *Selecting and Working With an Adoption Therapist*—www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_therapist.cfm.)

Community Health Organizations. Local public health organizations provide mental health services and referrals to local clinicians. Parents should check to find out if the provider has experience with adoptive families.

Parents can find local contact information for these resources from the Information Gateway's National Adoption Directory (www.childwelfare.gov/nad).

Paying for Postadoption Services

While many postadoption services are not free of charge to adoptive families, there may be Federal and State funding to support services for families who have adopted children from a public agency. Many children adopted from public agencies qualify for adoption assistance (subsidies) and Medicaid. These benefits are often used to purchase postadoption services. An adoption assistance agreement should spell out the types of postadoption services that will be reimbursed (such as respite care or counseling). To find out about postadoption services that are paid for by adoption assistance programs in a particular State, parents can access Information Gateway's webpage on Adoption Assistance by State at www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance.

If adoption assistance programs are not available, parents can check with their health insurance company or health maintenance organization regarding mental health benefits that may be applicable.

Some States may have additional funding to support families in attending seminars, conferences, and other educational events, or for other postadoption services. Parents can contact their State postadoption specialist for information on State postadoption funding, programs, and services that may be available.

Conclusion

Seeking out postadoption services is a common way for adoptive parents to find information or someone to talk to; for adoptive families who need more intensive or specialized services, there are places for them to turn. Such activities have become normal and expected for adoptive families. Clearly, there is nothing wrong (and everything right!) with a family that seeks postadoption support at any time throughout the lifelong process of adoption.

Resources

Child Welfare Information Gateway (www.childwelfare.gov) offers resources for adoptive families, including the following:

- National Adoption Directory, a database of public and private agencies, State postadoption specialists, and adoptive parent groups—www.childwelfare.gov/nad
- Database of upcoming conferences—www.childwelfare.gov/calendar/index.cfm
- The Adoption Assistance database, with information about postadoption services and funding provided by or through State agencies—www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance

- Listing of national organizations providing support to adoptive family members—
  www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?svcID=135&rate_chno=AR-0011A
- *Selecting and Working With an Adoption Therapist* factsheet—
  www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_therapist.cfm

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (www.nacac.org) provides resources for transracial families, a database of parent groups, and information on starting an adoptive parent support group.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org) offers a listing of pediatricians who specialize in adoption and foster care medicine, including international adoption clinics.

ARCH National Respite Network (www.archrespite.org) provides information about respite care and a searchable database of respite care providers.

National Adoption Magazines

- *Adoptive Families*
  www.adoptivefamilies.com
- *Adoption Today*
  www.adoptinfo.net
- *Rainbow Kids*
  www.rainbowkids.com/index.chtml
- *Fostering Families Today*
  www.fosteringfamiliestoday.com

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LAPP's Mission

We encourage and support foster and adoptive parents and relatives caring for children. We provide information, tools and tips for navigating the complexities of "The System." We give hope to children and teens at risk of growing up without a safe, permanent family. We advocate for new approaches to recruiting and retaining foster and adoptive families, and seek ways to reduce barriers to permanency for children in need.

LAPP's Roadmap Through The Foster Care System

LAPP's informational website, e-mail support network, and legal-procedural "toolkits" give you practical tools and tips to fit a wide variety of situations typically encountered by foster, kinship and pre-adoptive families. Our training classes teach families about legal issues, foster care topics and the juvenile court system. Links to downloadable court forms empower families to participate directly in court proceedings. Our self-help methods will guide you in getting questions answered, advocating for a child's needs, and participating in agency and court decision-making meetings and hearings. We've been there, done it, and can help you do it too!

LAPP
Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting

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(650) 712-1637 Fax
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Visit us on the web at:
www.LAPPonline.org
Regina M. Deihl, J.D., Executive Director

Navigating the foster care system: A Roadmap

LAPP
Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting

Adoption • Guardianship • Kinship Care

Who We Are

The attorneys at Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting (LAPP) are experienced dependency lawyers who have cared for foster children in their own homes as foster, adoptive and kinship parents. LAPP attorneys were inspired by both their personal and professional experiences to create a program to ease the fostering, adoptive and kinship experience for others. LAPP was the driving force behind new laws that improve communication between agencies, courts and caregivers and has co-authored a national legal manual for caregiver families.

LAPP Successes

"Fabulous presenters with vital information…"

– Community college trainee

"When my best friend had to move out of state, she used the court form we found on your website to tell the judge how much her foster son loves me and how well I could provide for him. Happy ending! "

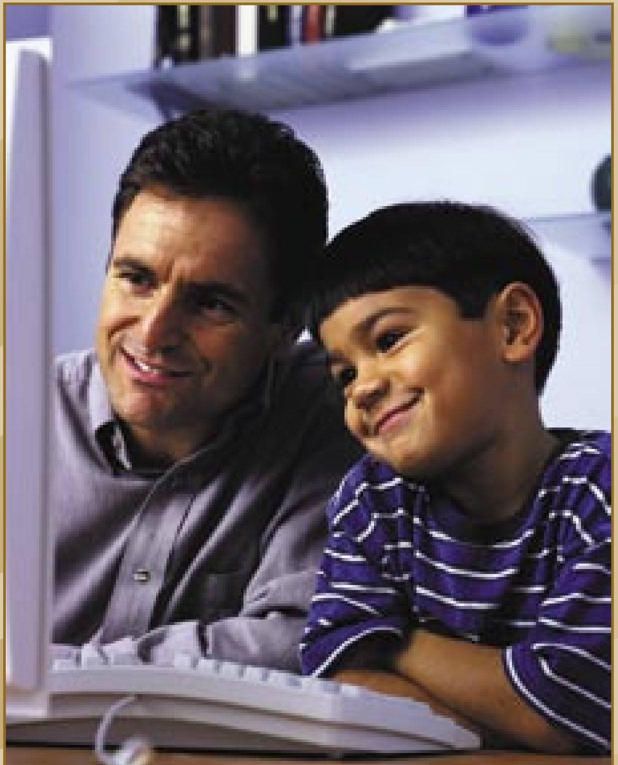
– John's legal guardian

"It's often hard to get a foster child the right services. LAPP has shown us how to do that."

– President, Foster Parent Association

Let LAPP Help You Navigate

- Support, Information and Referral
- Training and Public Speaking
- Interactive Website
- Self-Help Legal Toolkits
- Consulting Services for Individuals, Groups, and Communities
- Legal Research and Writing
- Community College Classes
- Legislative Advocacy



Foster and Kinship Family Facts

- There is a severe shortage of foster homes, yet cumbersome requirements deter many families from fostering or adopting.
- Of those foster children who do not return home, over half wait two years or more for a permanent family.
- One-third of foster children live with grandparents or other relatives. Thousands of relatives adopt or become permanent legal guardians.
- Both foster and kinship families can receive financial support to help reimburse the costs of caring for a child in foster care.
- Foster and kinship families are more likely than anyone else to provide a permanent home for foster children who cannot return to their parents.
- One study found 92% of parents who adopted a foster teen said they would consider adopting again.
- Studies show more Americans would consider providing a permanent home for children in foster care if they had better information and support.
- Most foster and kinship families care for more than one child and many care for siblings who need to grow up together.
- The vast majority of children in foster care report that they like who they are living with and feel like part of the family.

family BUILDERS byADOPTION

Welcome to Family Builders by Adoption

THE CHILDREN | SERVICES & RESOURCES | FBBA EN ESPANOL | GAY & LESBIAN ADOPTION | FAQ'S & GLOSSARY | FBBA LINKS | HOW YOU CAN HELP | OUR STA & BOAR

FAMILY BUILDERS

HOME

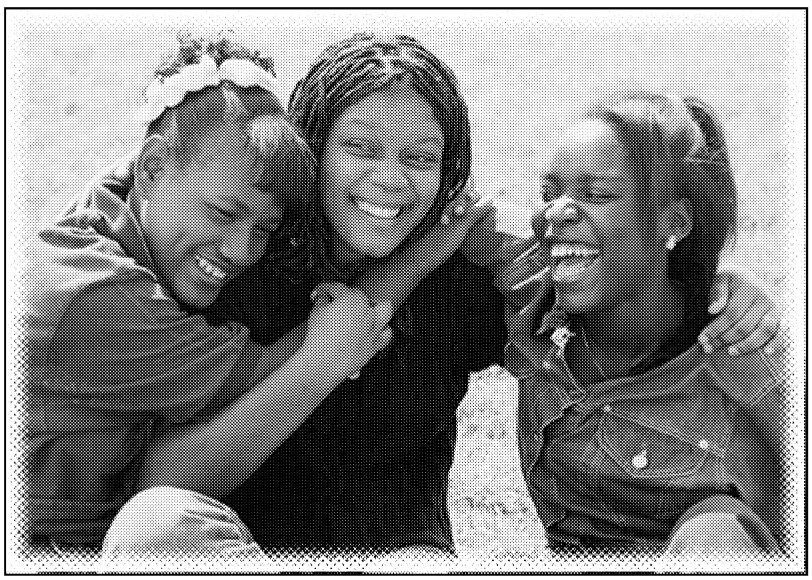
Who We Are - Our Mission - Our Services - CKC Child Search Form - Contact Us

Who we are

Family Builders By Adoption was established in 1976 in Oakland, California, as part of a larger child welfare agency, to serve children with special needs. In 1984, the organization became a separate corporation and licensed, non-profit adoption and foster care agency. Over the years, the agency has remained focused on finding adoptive families for children with special needs in the California foster care system.

Our Mission

We believe that every child has the right to grow up in a permanent loving family, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, medical, physical or emotional condition. We educate the community about the needs of waiting children, advocate on their behalf, and place children with permanent, secure families through adoption.



We welcome traditional families, single parent families, gay and lesbian families, transracial and multiracial families, and all other families in the nine Bay Area counties in which we are licensed to provide services to prospective adoptive parents. These counties are: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma

We are a member of the national Family Builders Adoption Network, the Child Welfare League of America, the California Association of Adoption Agencies, and the Adoption Exchange Association and are an accredited member of the California Alliance of Child and Family Services. Our services to families are free of charge for special needs adoption.

Our Services

Family Builders By Adoption provides a full range of services to families who wish to adopt a waiting child. In addition to an orientation and pre-adoption training, we offer ongoing support services, post-adoption training, groups, community building events, and an extensive library which is available to all our families.